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THE RELATION OF "AS YOU LIKE IT" TO ROBIN HOOD PLAYS.

THE life of the duke and his merry men in *As You Like It*, as has often been observed, is similar to that of Robin Hood and his men in the ballads. Its connection with the representation of Robin Hood on the London stage has not, however, been more than casually noticed.[1] It seems worth while, therefore, to consider the relation of *As You Like It*, produced in 1599, to two Robin Hood plays, the *Downfall* and the *Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington*,[2] acted in the preceding year.

The story of Robin Hood and his life in Sherwood had long been celebrated in popular poetry and was familiar to the Elizabethan public. The story was early given theatrical representation; three remnants of old Robin Hood plays have survived,[3] one of which probably antedates 1475; and there are many references to such plays, which were frequently performed in connection with the May celebrations. It seems probable that Robin Hood plays were also common on the public stage 1580–1600, but we know of only the following seven which were acted at the London theatres as early as *As You Like It*.

George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield. Quarto, 1599. S. R., 1595. Greene (?). Acted 1588–9.[4]

Edward I. Quarto, 1593. Peele. Acted 1591.[4]

A Pleasant Pastoral Comedy of Robin Hood and Little John. S. R., 1594. Non-extant and anonymous.

[1] Mr. Fleay in his *Life of Shakspere* (p. 208) says: "This play [*As You Like It*] is a rival to the Robin Hood plays acted at the Rose in 1598."

[2] Hazlitt's Dodsley. Vol. VIII.

[3] *Specimens of the Pre-Shaksperean Drama.* Manly, 1897. Vol. I.

[4] See Fleay, *Chronicle of the Drama*, under the head of each play for these dates, all conjectural.

The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington.[1] Quarto, 1601. Licensed 1598.[2] Munday and Chettle.[3] Acted 1598.[2] Altered for court, Nov. 18, 1598.[2]

The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington.[1] Quarto, 1601. Licensed 1598.[2] Munday and Chettle. Acted 1598.[2]

Look About You. Quarto, 1600. Anon. Acted 1599 (?)[4]

Robin Hood's Pen'orths. Non-extant. Haughton. Acted 1600–1.[2]

One passage in the *Downfall* of Robert, Earl of Huntington, may be quoted as evidence of the existence and of the nature of other Robin Hood plays.

"*Lit. John.* Skelton, a word or two beside the play.
Friar. Now, Sir John Eltham, what is't you would say?
Lit. John. Methinks, I see no jests of Robin Hood,
No merry morrices of Friar Tuck,
No pleasant skippings up and down the wood,
No hunting songs, no coursing of the buck.
Pray God this play of ours may have good luck,
And the king's majesty mislike it not.
Friar. And if he do, what can we do to that?
I promis'd him a play of Robin Hood,
His honourable life in merry Sherwood.
His majesty himself survey'd the plot,
And bad me boldly write it: it was good.
For merry jests they have been shown before
As how the friar fell into the well
For love of Jenny, that fair bonny belle;
How Greenleaf robb'd the Shrieve of Nottingham,
And other mirthful matter full of game.
Our play expresses noble Robert's wrong;" etc. [act IV].

[1] There is no reference to Robin Hood as the Earl of Huntington, noted by Professor Child, which antedates these plays. How much of Munday's plot was based on an earlier tradition or narrative and how much is of his invention are uncertain. Cf. Child's *Ballads*, III, 46, 519 n. H. L. D. Ward, *Catalogue of Romances*, 506 f. A. Ruckdeschel, *A Dissertation* on the sources of these plays. Erlangen, 1897. It should be noted that in *Look About You*, printed in the year before these two plays, Robert is the Earl of Huntington, "son of Gilbert;" but that play may have been acted later than the Huntington plays.

[2] See Henslow's *Diary*.

[3] Chettle revised this play for the court and collaborated on the second part.

[4] See Fleay, *Chronicle of the Drama*, under the head of each play for these dates, all conjectural.

This passage seems to refer to an earlier play[1] or, more probably, plays, which treated more of the merry jests and the merry forest life and less of the tragical story than the Earl of Huntington plays.

"The pleasant pastoral comedy of *Robin Hood and Little John*" may have contained "pleasant skippings up and down the wood," "hunting songs," and "coursing of the deer;" at least the title "pastoral" suggests an Arcadian forest life. Of *Robin Hood's Pennyworths* nothing can be even surmised. In three of the extant plays, the portions dealing with Robin Hood are slight. In *Look About You* Robin Hood, the Earl of Huntington, is a page and not an outlaw. *George a Greene* deals with stories belonging to the cycle but has nothing to do with the forest life in Sherwood. In *Edward I.* Llewellyn and his followers, when hard pressed by the king, retire to the forest and play at Robin Hood. They wear green; the Friar is wanton and also a singer; there is some pleasant talk between the pseudo Maid Marian and Robin; there are hostile visitors in the forest, Mortimer who comes to woo Marian and King Edward who seeks the rebel; and there are several fights; but the whole account is slight. Our knowledge of the presentation of the Sherwood life on the London stage rests, therefore, almost entirely on the two Huntington plays.

These cannot be classed under any distinct dramatic genre. They are a sort of hybrid of chronicle histories and tragedies of blood, with a mixture of such incongruous matter as the Skeltonic parts. A considerable portion of the two plays, however, is given up to a representation of the life of Robin Hood and his outlaws in the forest; and it is with this element that we have to deal.

This portion of the plot may be briefly summarized. Earl Robert is outlawed and succeeds by means of a disguise in carrying Matilda, his betrothed, with him to Sherwood forest. Little John joins them and he and Robert free Scarlet and Scathlock from the sheriff Warman, Earl Robert's traitorous steward. Together with Friar Tuck and Much, they resolve

[1] Cf. conjectures by Fleay, *Chr.* II, 115, and H. L. D. Ward, *Catalogue of Romances*, p. 506.

to live a merry life, hunting the deer, befriending the poor, and harassing only the rich churchmen and usurers. No titles are permitted, the earl becomes Robin Hood, and Matilda, Maid Marian, under which name she resolves to live a virgin until Robin Hood is restored to his rights. While living merrily in the forest, they are visited by all of Robin Hood's old enemies; by Doncaster and the Prior, who come to capture Robin Hood; and by Warman, Ely, and Prince John, who come in turn fleeing as outlaws. All these are forgiven and received with great kindness. Finally, King Richard himself comes to the forest; but at the festivities in his welcome, Robin Hood is poisoned by the villain Doncaster.

So far as this part of the play has any distinct motive, it is that of forgiveness. Robin Hood is the embodiment of charity and forgives his worst enemies. Even when this forgiving spirit results in his being poisoned, he still maintains it to the very end and dies saying,

"Let sweet forgiveness be my passing bell."[1]

This forgiveness is, moreover, brought into strong dramatic contrast with the utter knavery and blood-thirstiness of Doncaster, Prince John and other of his enemies. The sentimental love of Maid Marian gives a certain prettiness to the story, and there are traces, too, of the virginity motive which is found in the Arcadian pastorals; but the element which gives the story its chief charm is the depiction of the out-of-door life.

An open-air atmosphere is often undeniably present, although the authors profess to deal mainly with the tragical story. Without the aid of scenery, they certainly attempted in many scenes to represent on the stage the merry forest life endeared to the English people and they contrived to give their poetry not a little of the woodland flavor.

A couple of quotations, despite their somewhat crude poetry, will serve, I think, to indicate this.

[1] *The Death of R. H.* Act I, p. 244, Hazlitt's Dodsley, Vol. VIII. All page references will be to this edition.

"Wind once more, jolly huntsmen, all your horns;
Whose shrill sound, with the echoing wood's assist,
Shall ring a sad knell for the fearful deer,
Before our feather'd shafts, death's winged darts,
Bring sudden summons for their fatal ends."[1]

"Marian, thou seest, though courtly pleasures want,
Yet country sport in Sherwood is not scant;.
For the soul-ravishing delicious sound
Of instrumental music, we have found
The winged quiristers with divers notes
Sent from their quaint recording pretty throats,
On every branch that compasseth our bow'r,
Without command contenting us each hour.
For arras hangings and rich tapestry
We have sweet nature's best embroidery.
For thy steel glass, wherein thou wont'st to look,
Thy crystal eyes gaze in a crystal brook.
At court a flower or two did deck thy head,
Now with whole garlands is it circled.
For what in wealth we want, we have in flowers,
And what we lose in halls, we find in bowers."[2]

In spite of the apology for the lack of hunting songs, several songs help to produce the idea of out-of-door freedom. They are the pedlers' song[3] which reminds one a little of Autolycus, Jenny's song,[4] not given in the text, a verse from a ballad by Prince John,[5] and the woodmen's dirge[6] over Robin Hood.

Some of the scenes and some bits of stage business may be noted by themselves in order to indicate the way in which the woodland life is made presentable. We find several lively fighting scenes such as are characteristic of the ballads: e. g., the rescue of Scarlet and Scathlock[7] and the capture of the prior[8] and Doncaster. Scathlock, too, describes a wrestling match.[9] Maid Marian and Queen Elinor exchange clothes,[10] and there are frequent disguises, but the maid disguised as a boy does not appear. Friar Tuck and Much supply the comic element; Much serves as the clown of the piece, and his eagerness to woo Jenny adds to the fun.

[1] *The Downfall*, III, 2, p. 151.
[2] *The Downfall*, III, 2, p. 154.
[3] III, 2, p. 161.
[4] III, 2, p. 162.
[5] V, p. 195. All in *Downfall*.
[6] *Death of R., E. of H.*, I, p. 249.
[7] *The Downfall*, II, 2.
[8] *The Downfall*, III, 2.
[9] *The Downfall*, III, 2.
[10] *The Downfall*, I, 3, p. 120.

In contrast with his childish fun, we have the really beautiful and pathetic scene at Robin Hood's death.[1] He dies in Marian's arms, forgiving all, begging all to be equally forgiving; and for himself, begging that there may be no mourning at his funeral—but

> "For holy dirges sing me woodmen's songs,
> As ye to Wakefield walk, with voices shrill."[2]

And so they carry him to his grave singing—

> "Here lie his primer and his beads,
> His bent bow and his arrows keen,
> His good sword and his holy cross:
> Now cast on flowers fresh and green;
>
> And as they fall, shed tears and say,
> Wella, wella-day! wella, wella-day:
> Thus cast ye flowers and sing,
> And on to Wakefield take your way."[3]

Flowers are, indeed, strewed about the stage on several occasions. Thus, when Marian and Jenny are busy preparing the feast for the king,[4] Marian calls for Jenny to bring the flowers and Jenny reports that she has "straw'd the dining bowers;" aud later, according to the stage directions, Marian appears strewing flowers. So again, when old Fitzwater wanders in distress to the forest, he finds Robin Hood sleeping on a green bank, and Marian strewing flowers on him.[5] This use of flowers on the stage is rather significant because it is one of the few devices open to Elizabethan play-wrights by which the forest life could be visually presented to the spectators.

The pedlers (the Friar and Jenny disguised), with their wares and songs, help on the out-of-door effect. So, too, does the account of the hunt and death of the stag of a hundred years. At the feast, the horns wind and all, enter, "Friar Tuck carrying a stag's head, dancing," and a copper ring about the stag's

[1] *The Death*, etc., I, 2, p. 243, seq. [2] *The Death*, I, 2, p. 247.

[3] *The Death*, I, 2, p. 249. For another Robin Hood song by Munday, see the pageant, *Metropolis Coronation and the Triumph of Ancient Drapery*, 1615. This song is also printed in *Lyrics from the Dramatists of the Elizabethan Age*, ed. A. H. Bullen, 1889.

[4] *The Death*, I, 2, p. 236. [5] *The Downfall*, III, 2, p. 159.

neck is found to have been placed there by Harold Harefoot. Throughout the play there is a continual winding of horns and there are many bits of hunting scenes. Robin, the outlaws, and even King Richard appear in green as is shown by frequent allusions[1] and by Henslow's inventory of properties.

On the whole, then, we may conclude that the two plays represent a definite effort to present the out-of-door atmosphere of Sherwood.[2] If the phrasing in the main lacks the power to suggest the freshness of the woodland to us who are accustomed to the "native wood-notes wild" of the great master, yet we can hardly doubt that to an audience, familiar with the ballads and quick to catch suggestions from the song, description or the simplest stage device, the Sherwood scenes were by no means the least attractive portions of the plays.

An attempt to determine the relation between *As You Like It* and contemporary plays is slightly complicated by the fact that it closely follows Lodge's novel *Rosalynde*.[3] The questions before us are: did contemporary plays influence Shakspere in his choice of a nine years' old novel for dramatization, and did they influence him in his treatment of the material supplied by the novel?

Now the possibility of some connection between *As You Like It* and the two Huntington plays is unquestionable. They were certainly acted in 1598 by Henslow's company, the Lord Admiral's men; and *As You Like It* was certainly acted by the Chamberlain's men, not before 1598, nor after 1600.[4] In the close relations which existed between theatres and dramatists in the small city of that time, there is every reason to suppose that Shakspere had some knowledge of these two plays by the rival company. They were successful enough to be given at court in the Christmas season of 1598; there is nothing im-

[1] *Downfall*, I, 1, p. 106. V, 1, p. 195, p. 202.

[2] I can not assent to Professor Schelling's dictum in regard to "their total failure to reproduce the fresh atmosphere of Sherwood forest which breathes through the ballads." *The English Chronicle Play*. New York, 1902, p. 160.

[3] Dr. Furness has cautiously advanced the hypothesis that Shakspere revised an old play. There is little internal and no external evidence to support this.

[4] It is not on Meres' list, 1598, and was entered S. R., 1600. There is almost universal agreement that it was first acted in 1599.

probable *per se* in the suggestion that they called forth a rival play in the following year from Burbadge's company. We may examine *As You Like It,* then, to discover if it was in any respect their rival.

In this connection it may not be irrelevant to note that Shakspere's choice of a pastoral novel seems to find an explanation in the stage history of the time. Between 1597 and 1600, the Chapel children revived Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis* and probably other of his plays with pastoral elements. In 1599, Henslow made payments for two non-extant plays: the *Pastoral Tragedy* by Chapman, and the *Arcadian Virgin* by Chettle and Haughton. In or before 1600, the *Maid's Metamorphosis* was produced. Earlier than this there had been many entertainments and plays of a pastoral character, and many of the devices and situations, familiar in eclogues and pastoral novels, had already been represented on the stage. In the years 1597–1600, pastoral plays were especially popular on the London stage.[1] In 1599, Shakspere dramatized an old novel and apparently did his work somewhat hastily[2] though with complete mastery. He chose a novel that supplied dramatic material of a sort then popular, and receiving the attention of at least two rival companies and a number of his fellow dramatists.

To the material derived from *Rosalynde,* we have some evidence that he was consciously adding a Robin Hood element. In the first scene of the play, Charles, the wrestler, thus describes the life of the old duke.[3]

"They say he is already in the forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world."

This reference to Robin Hood is a distinct addition to the novel—where we are merely told that Gerismond "lived as an outlaw

[1] For a further consideration of the pastoral plays mentioned in this paragraph, I may refer to my paper, the *Pastoral Element in the English Drama before 1605,* Mod. Lang. Notes, XIV, 4.

[2] Cf. Clarendon Press Ed. *As You Like It:* Introduction.

[3] I, 1, 120, seq.

in the forest of Arden"—and may fairly be said to give indication of the treatment of the outlaws' merry life that follows.

How far this treatment differs from that of the novel can be seen by the fact that there are four scenes (II, 1; II, 5; II, 7; and IV, 2) which deal entirely with the life of the banished duke and his foresters and which, except for the entrance of Orlando and Adam in the third, have no counterparts in the novel. The open-air atmosphere, then, that pervades these scenes, and to a degree, of course, other scenes as well, is not only a delightful element in the poetry; it is a result of a distinct addition. Theatrically, it comes from a definitely developed attempt to picture the life of the outlaws in the forest where song and merriment and hunting filled up the idle hours. That such a picture was not new on the stage, seems certain from our examination of the Earl of Huntington plays, and Shakspere's own reference to Robin Hood gives us some ground for surmising that it was directly suggested by the similar picture in those plays.

How similar are the means taken to secure the woodland atmosphere can at once be seen by a comparison of the Duke Senior's opening speech[1] with the speech of Robin Hood, already quoted.

> "Marian, thou seest though courtly pleasures want,
> Yet country sport in Sherwood is not scant"—etc.[2]

Thus the duke compares the forest and the court with finer moralizing, but with less manifest joy in the woodland pleasures.

> "Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile
> Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
> Than that of painted pomp?" etc.[3]

In the scenic presentation, we have, moreover, the same main situation as in the Robin Hood plays. The duke like Robin Hood is outlawed and is joined by a band of friends who occupy their time largely with merry making and hunting. To their forest home, as to Robin Hood's, come other wanderers from the court, the Duke Ferdinand with hostile intent, and Oliver, Orlando and Adam seeking refuge.

[1] II, 1, 1–seq. [2] *Downfall*, III, 2, p. 154. [3] II, 1, 1.

The same spirit of charity reigns there as in Sherwood. Orlando, in spite of his violence, is hospitably received, the wicked Oliver is freely forgiven, and the usurping duke falls under the spell of the forest and repents. In the receptions of Oliver and Orlando, Shakspere followed the novel: but in the final conversion of the usurper, he departed from Lodge who sends the banished king and his outlaws to fight it out with the usurping king. In this instance, at least, we have evidence that Shakspere felt the spirit of repentance and forgiveness and peace to be an essential of the forest life. If not so prominently presented as in the *Earl of Huntington* plays, this spirit is certainly manifest in the Arden of *As You Like It.*

Here, too, as in Sherwood, a merry fool supplies much of the sport, and, as in the Robin Hood plays, the outlaws enter and find "a table set out" and proceed to feast on venison.[1] Again, there is the celebration over the death of the deer, as in the *Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington.*[2] In Arden, too, as in Sherwood, there are songs and much talk of hunting among the foresters. Still further, the lords of the duke's company, who according to the stage directions, appear once "like foresters"[3] and again "like outlaws,"[4] doubtless wore green and appeared on the stage very much like Robin Hood's men.

There is, to be sure, little of the boisterous side of life in *As You Like It.* There are no fights like those of Robin Hood, no rude pranks like those of Much and the Friar, and far less hearty delight in hunting. Even the duke laments a little over the deer,[5] and the fantastic nature of the novel's Arcadian conventions pervades even the outlaw scenes. And, of course, the woodland atmosphere is made far more daintily beautiful than in the Robin Hood plays by means of the finer phrasing and the lovely lyrics.

Yet the Robin Hood element is there and is not in the novel. In the picturing of a free and easy life where the free air of the woods makes idleness seem worthy, and adversity and

[1] *Death of R., E. of H.*, I, 3, p. 236, seq. *A. Y. L. I.*, II, 7.
[2] *Death of R., E. of H.*, I, 2, p. 231. *A. Y. L. I.*, IV, 2.
[3] *A. Y. L. I.*, II, 1. [4] *A. Y. L. I.*, II, 7.
[5] *A. Y. L. I.*, II, 1, 21.

melancholy, things to be merry over, Shakspere had a predecessor not in Lodge but in one of his fellow-dramatists, Chettle or Munday. Moreover, the mixture of songs and hunting, the lords clothed as foresters, the feasting, the rejoicing over the deer—in fact all the means used by Shakspere to represent this life on the stage are decidedly like the means used much more crudely by Munday and Chettle and probably by other authors of Robin Hood plays. If the delicate beauty of Shakspere's picture prevents us from tracing any more direct indebtedness, we are at least safe in saying that in adding this Robin Hood element, Shakspere was not unmindful of what others had tried to do. In dramatizing a popular novel, he introduced scenes presenting a picture of a life already familiar on the stage—or, to put the case boldly, he added a Robin Hood element to his *As You Like It* in rivalry of Robin Hood plays then being acted at an opposition theatre.

Possibly the significance of this conclusion lies principally in the suggestion that inferences in regard to Shakspere's subjective moods and personal experiences may be less likely to furnish clues for the reasons of his choice and treatment of subjects than a study of contemporary plays and dramatic fashions.

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